



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Dead Season: A Story of Murder and Revenge on the Philippine Island of Negros by Alan Berlow

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traditions. For this reader, the big pay off came with the integrative chapters 7–9, wherein homologous structures of the Alchemical Body were set forth.

Thus, I take the book's central thesis to be resoundingly proven (p. 10): "Yoga and alchemy were complementary, interpreting disciplines . . . the Rasa Siddhas and Nāth Siddhas, if they were not one and the same people, were at least closely linked in their practice."

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SOUTHEAST ASIA

Dead Season: A Story of Murder and Revenge on the Philippine Island of Negros. By ALAN BERLOW. New York: Pantheon Books, 1996. xvi, 302 pp. \$25.00.

Tightroping between the fictively "known" and the putatively unknowable, this book represents the very finest kind of investigative journalism. It is essentially an attempt to find the truth behind three violent deaths—of a peasant farmer, a wealthy landlord, and a soldier—in the town of Himamaylan in 1988. Over the next seven years Alan Berlow conducted more than 200 interviews and encountered, above all:

Tsismis: stories, intrigue, lies, gossip, speculation. Gathered up like rice in a basket and tossed in the air, sending husks to the wind, leaving behind kernels of truth. Truth and half-truths, anyway, or private truths, mixed together, folded into one another, became the gruel of life. *Tsismis* sorted out the mysteries, pieced together conspiracies, created "facts," and made sense of the madness. Tales of the murders traveled from witnesses to friends to enemies to the fish hawker in the market place, to the lady selling amulets, to Willy the meat vendor, and from them emerged multiple antinomies, contradictory explanations, epitaphs that gave voice to the ineffable.

Tsismis (p. 59)

To his credit, the author, while confronting these contradictions, does not claim that he has reconciled them. He provides local color and background information—mostly for non-Filipino readers, though Filipinos should also appreciate them—then lets the witnesses speak for themselves.

What emerges is not a clear-cut story, much less an edifying one: "If you're looking for a story with a happy ending on Negros, the best place to find one is on the radio" (p. 243). We will never know for sure why the Scout Rangers blew away Moret de los Santos and his children, nor how the New People's Army singled out Serafin (Apin) Gatuslao to execute, nor whether Gerry de los Santos committed suicide or was murdered by his commanding officer. If there were profound political or spiritual lessons embodied by any of these deaths, no one seems to have learned them. The presumed perpetrators of these crimes did not generally prosper, but then neither did the survivors or witnesses.

Negros (and, by extension, the entire Philippines) is the real protagonist—and victim—of this tale. The island appears as a bleak, stunted, violent land; its forests

and its society equally violated by its settlers, particularly the dominant sugar-planting elite. Berlow has little use for the NPA and seems to regard the Roman Catholic Church there as having been ineffectual, if not irrelevant, but his real scorn is for those who own Negros and have systematically destroyed it. His language is often more lyrical than polemic, but the message is clear: they have brought it on themselves.

“To change the system will take one or two generations,” [*hacendero* Eduardo] Locsin says with self-assurance. Meanwhile, he is content to tend the hundreds of orchids that fill the backyard of his Bacolod home, gorgeous lavender, white, yellow, and copper blooms that seem to live on nothing but air.

(p. 159)

Dead Season reads more like a novel than an academic work. There are no footnotes, though the “Notes on Sources” (pp. 280–88) indicate the author’s command of the relevant scholarly literature. For the bulk of what is said, however, we have to take Berlow’s journalistic competence and integrity on faith. I for one do; it all makes sense, and no one—certainly no one who was not living in Negros at the time—will ever be in a position to prove him wrong.

Serious Filipinists will find little that is factually or analytically new in this volume, except the specific events described, which, as the author acknowledges, are scarcely remembered outside Negros. What *Dead Season* does offer us is texture and insight, a profound reminder of how Philippine “democracy” actually operates in the provinces. I recommend it highly for all readers—specialists and outsiders, Filipinos and non-Filipinos—as an elegant example both of how elusive the facts about contemporary Asia can be and of how well journalistic tenacity and literary grace can make the underlying truth come alive.

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Masters of War: Military Dissent and Politics in the Vietnam Era. By ROBERT BUZZANCO. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996. xiv, 386 pp. \$34.95 (cloth); \$18.95 (paper).

No definitive history of U.S. policy in the Vietnam War is about to appear, but every year there are some useful contributions on the subject. Robert Buzzanco’s *Masters of War* looks at the policy positions of top military officers and their interactions with one another and with the presidents they served. The bulk of the book is devoted to the administration of Lyndon Johnson, but four preliminary chapters cover the years 1950–63.

Buzzanco argues that many senior officers were pessimistic about Vietnam from the beginning. When they urged escalation, they often did so not in a genuine effort to get the president to authorize action that would win the war—they often knew that the things they were asking either could not be granted or would not be effective, or both—but in order to establish a paper trail, to be able to say later that the president had turned down their proposals and that this was why American efforts had failed.

Buzzanco has worked from written sources, not interviews. He has turned up valuable new information in various archives, particularly those of the Marine Corps, but after a while the details of which general said what blur into one another; it is